## CHURCH WEEKLY

## July 2021



His Holiness Baselios Marthoma Paulose-II, the Malankara Metropolitan and Catholicos of the Malankara Orthodox Church left for his heavenly abode at 2.35 a.m. on Monday 12 July 2021...

Prayerful Condolences from the Alwaye Fellowship House...
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#### Abstract

  

























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Kingdom of God - 6<br>Dr. T. Jacob John, Vellore

## Churches, Parishes and the Healing Ministry

The commission to the believers and followers of Christ includes healing of the sick. "Then He called His twelve disciples together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases. He sent them to preach the Kingdom of God and to heal the sick" (Luke 9: 1,2).
"After these things the Lord appointed seventy others also, and sent them two by two ahead of Him into every city and place where He Himself was about to go. Then He said to them: The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few; therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into His harvest. Go your way, behold I send you out as lambs among wolves....Whatever city you enter, and they receive you, eat such things as are set before you. And heal the sick who are there and say to them: The Kingdom of God has come near to you." (Luke 10: 1,2, 8,9).

These were seventy chosen disciples who were messengers sent to the 35 (or more) towns where He Himself was planning to visit. When the King Himself comes, the Kingdom arrives too. We presume that Luke did not have details of the actual visit of Jesus Himself to these towns.

We all belong to some parish or worshipping community. We come together to celebrate the Lord's shared bread, the Eucharist. We teach our children in Sunday schools. Some of our parishes may be running schools as well. All these are church functions and activities. Then, what about the Kingdom of God? Are we not, all of us members of various churches,
also citizens of the Kingdom of God? How are the two - Kingdom of God and the Church, linked? We do have High Priests, Priests, Pastors, Elders and Deacons in most churches. Are they, or are they not, also our leaders in the Kingdom of God? Either way - whether church and kingdom are intimately linked or overlapping, or two independent entities whatever the views of the ecclesiastic hierarchy, we cannot ignore the mission to 'Go heal all manner of sickness' among the people. But do we take the healing ministry seriously? Can the church be true to our calling, our commission, mission, our Christava dharma, without the mission to heal people around us?

The Christian influence on European thought had resulted in conceptualising human rights and in naming healthcare as human right through various forums and declarations. As a result, all democratic countries of Europe work on the principle that the State is responsible for the health of the people. Universal healthcare is practised in all of them, and in Canada and Australia. Not so, in India or in the USA - in India for want of clear moral principles of equality and human rights in spite of being a democracy, and in the USA for their capitalistic political philosophy, in spite of being a democracy.

The ministry of healing must therefore take a different style and shape in varied circumstances. However, we are sure of one thing: the need is greatest in India - the harvest is plenty, but we are so few. Yet, we do not seem to take the Christava dharma, mission of healing ministry, seriously. Are we under the
belief that the job of healthcare belongs to physicians and their clinics and hospitals, but that the churches and parishes/congregations have nothing to do with it?

I once heard the Late Rev. Fr. K.C. Joseph using a simile to emphasise the true role of the Christian Church in the world surrounding us. During World War II, Burma was occupied by the Japanese army, who were spread thin. What the British did was to send a contingent of highly trained and well-armed commandos -- air lifted and parachuted down in one strategic spot. They fought through widening circles and the enemy soldiers were taken by surprise and they retreated and thus Burma was captured by the Allies.

Are we merely to gather on Sundays in our churches, worship, pray and partake in the Eucharist and all the feasts and festivals, and keep the churches locked on all other days or times? All that we do are important, no doubt. But that is just for us. What about the communities around the churches? Do we have any duties towards them?

Here, I think, is one crucial junction between, or conjunction of, the Kingdom and the Church. The Kingdom principles demand our Christava dharma to be applied in the communities around us. Just because there are clinics and hospitals, both in the public sector and in the private sector, the Church cannot absolve itself from the fundamental dharma of promoting health and healing sicknesses.

St. Paul in his first letter to the Church in Corinth described how the Church congregation should conduct itself. "Men have different gifts, but it is the same Spirit who gives them. There are different ways of serving God, but it is the same Lord who is served. God works through different men in different ways, but it is the same God who achieves His purposes through them all. Each man is given his gift by the Spirit that he may use it for the common good. One man's gift by the Spirit is to speak with wisdom,
another's to speak with knowledge. The same Spirit gives to another man faith, to another the ability to heal, to another the power to do great deeds. The same Spirit gives to another man the gift of preaching the word of God, to another the ability to discriminate in spiritual matters, to another speech in different tongues and to yet another the power to interpret the tongues." (1 Corinthians 12: 4-11, New Testament in Modern English).

Every congregation consists of members men, women, the elderly, youth and children with diverse gifts, talents, aptitudes and interests. Every congregation is drawn from the community, and all members wear different hats in the community, but when they come together as the Church, what purpose do they serve? We worship together and we partake of the Eucharist. We listen to the teachings and preaching. We conduct organisational and management activities. We may have women's fellowships, youth organisations, bible classes, Sunday school, etc. All these are self-serving, albeit necessary and unavoidable. Do the functions of the coming together of the congregation get fulfilled by only serving ourselves?

Do our Church leadership have a policy on, or even a definition of, human health? Are we aware of the ramifications of the concept of health? How much importance do Church leaders and Pastors or parish Priests give to health, even of the members, their families, women, youth, children, as well as the health of the people around the place we all meet together for prayer and worship? "...the Kingdom of God is not a matter of a spate of words, but of the power of Christian living" (1 Corinthians 4: 20).

Every church denomination individually or jointly, must develop a policy on health and healing. We need a Kingdom definition of health. We must teach our children in Sunday Schools, the critical importance of health in the

Kingdom values, taking the body as the temple of the Holy Spirit, to quote St Paul. We must teach them about mental health and about the problems of depression. Children should know about drugs and addictions, to prepare them to face temptations and allurements, with knowledge and conviction, long before they are tempted in schools or universities. This is very important for the health of our children and even grown-ups. We must teach them about body hygiene, the significance of touch - the good touch and the bad touch, and prepare them to live their lives as citizens of the Kingdom during childhood, adolescence and as adults.

Experts should be assigned the task of developing a curriculum and teaching material. Similarly, our youth organisations, women's fellowships, bible study groups, etc. must have a mandate to learn about and meditate on health and healing. Every theological seminary must give immense importance to the Kingdom principles of health and healing.

Do we owe anything to the community of people of different faiths and different needs around our places of worship? In our context, are we conscious of our calling to 'heal the sick who are there'? Do we not have a duty to promote health in the community? Does not the call to "go heal" subsume "go prevent diseases"?

By symbolically delegating healing and health to 'mission' hospitals, is not the Church missing the Kingdom role? If mission hospitals take money-making as their mission, do they still qualify to be symbolic representatives of the Kingdom on behalf of the Church? After symbolic delegation, do we as Church and as congregations, or as parishes, support and nurture our mission hospitals? Do mission hospitals recognise they are the representation of the Church in its healing ministry to the people around, those in need? Can mission hospitals function on profit basis or function
on no-profit basis? What should be the mission of mission hospitals?

Should not parishes be also healing communities and the church or parish be a healing and health centre for the community around? The potential is so vast that I do not want to put my ideas forward, which may stifle the inspired and imaginative thinking of Church leaders and lay leaders? We can imagine all sorts of excuses - but in the Kingdom of God, excuses have no place.

The older generation of readers will recall how our Churches responded or rather failed to respond to the global pandemic of HIV/AIDS as it affected India, by taking the position that it was a disease of sexual immorality and the Churches as spiritual organisations had no role to play in it. The Christian Medical Association of India and the Catholic Health Association of India rose to the occasion but many Churches were too embarrassed to confront a disease of sexual transmission. It was the Christian Medical College that was at the forefront, leading India to respond sensibly. No wonder, its founder had declared that she was not merely establishing a medical college, but was extending the Kingdom of God. HIV/AIDS acted as a spotlight on our muddled thinking. Health and healing are the mission of the Kingdom of God and if Churches believe they are functioning as the Kingdom also, health and healing are part and parcel of the Church's Christava dharma.

Note : My sincere request to the readers is to meditate on these issues and come up with ideas and models that may fulfil some of the healing and health issues that Churches and parishes can,or must, do by themselves. Please write them as letters to the Editor of the Church Weekly. We can review them and consolidate and write a summary for pushing this envelope further, for our meditation and for designing an action plan.
(To be continued)

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## The Lifebont You Need



## Same Quarantine Thoughts

"Mightier than the waves of the sea is His love for you." Psalm 93:4

'T
Titanic' is a masterpiece blockbuster movie directed by the equally popular James Cameron. Everyone knows Jack and Rose and their everlasting love story. Everyone knows how it's based upon the true story of the once largest boat afloat in 1912 which met with a tragic accident on its maiden voyage.I wish to share with you what I felt yesterday as I saw it again on TV.

The Titanic has hit the iceberg. The captain and crew try not to panic. Everyone is told to wear warm clothes and a life jacket, and to come to the deck. Rose's mother Ruth tells her stewardess to keep the water heater as she would want a hot coffee as she comes back to her room. Wow! What arrogance! Now, doesn't that sound similar to what is happening in our world even now?

I'm not saying that all first class aristocrats are arrogant. But still the disparity is underlyingvery deep inside - grown over the centuries and millenniums. Today as we fight the pandemic also, those who have money are catered to instantly. On another side, there are many millions who don't heed to the government guidelines to take care of themselves, thinking that it's not for them. Freedom - it's their freedom not to wear a mask. Oh right. Cal Hockley, Rose's fiancé, is the epitome of pride all through. He wants things done his way, and revenge shown his way too,
even as the ship is sinking. Aren't we like that sometimes?

The Captain of the Titanic, Edward Smith, says before the voyage begins that "even God Himself couldn't sink the Titanic". Such dependence on a man-made vessel of iron! He even refused to alter course and disregarded warnings of the iceberg from other ships, relying on the modern shipbuilding techniques. Our generation still hasn't learned its lesson. We are technologically advanced and live in luxury and conveniences more than ever before. We never imagine this society could sink. A virus is out loose and knocking at our door, but we still hold onto our temporary comforts and refuse to believe the sight of the world slowly falling apart. It has been crumbling for years now. But we humans just go on with our busy immoral lives, reluctant to accept a higher power that can send us a lifeboat when we need it the most.

Amateurs built the Ark, but professionals built the Titanic. Noah was submissive to God, while the builders of the great ship were overconfident. Noah had warned the people about what was to come, but even as the iceberg hit the vessel there were people blissfully ignoring the shakes and sounds around them. Ancient Israel was also like that. They did not want to listen to the warning or correct their mistakes. They wanted to hear about pleasant things. James 4:13 \& 14 warned them: "You don't know what will happen tomorrow. Life is like a vapour that appears for a little time, then vanishes away." It is time to take off your blindfolds and look around you. We don't have
to go down with the sinking ship or let those around us sink either.

The Carpathia came to rescue those who lost everything that day. Out of the 2,200 passengers only 700 boarded the lifeboats, were shifted to the Carpathia and taken to New York, which was the original destination of the Titanic. How many lives were lost; how much wealth! A tragedy which could have been averted. Cameron omitted the episode of the Californian, which is a huge part of the real Titanic tragedy. The Californian is one of the ships that had sent out warning messages about the iceberg. Later, as it was night, they had stopped their journey and even turned off their signals. So they didn't receive Titanic's call for help. But the crew had revealed that they saw eight white rockets in the sky which surely indicated an emergency nearby and even though they were the nearest, the Captain did not take the trouble to go in the night to help them. The Titanic was able to connect with the Carpathia, which was four hours away, and by the time it came, most of the passengers had died in the cold ocean, unable to find places in the 20 lifeboats floating around them. It was interesting to read in the internet that, unlike the Captain of the Californian, Captain Arthur Rostron of the Carpathia conducted a thanksgiving prayer for those who were saved and a memorial service for those who lost their lives in the sea.

What do we learn from this piece of history? How many calamities and tragedies have come our way already, and how many more should come for us to open our eyes? Do we blindly believe that this world or any particular country is unsinkable? Is THE END near? Will we be helpful to those in need like the Carpathia or unmindful like the Californian? Do we just think that we'll later bribe someone for a seat in the lifeboat - may be even God?

We are heading for the dark waters at full speed, ignoring all warnings, inattentive to the signs, unwilling to take a detour. We hear the cries around us, but continue to 'sleep'. We know we've done something wrong, but just
don't allow our conscience to stop us or open our hearts to God's way. We might even keep a 'Do not disturb' sign at our door. We think money, science and technology can solve any problem, and we take pride in temporary manmade mansions of concrete and tiles. Immorality is our way of life and we don't care about the mounting pollution. We like to sit back and enjoy watching someone else's life on the screen as if it's a movie. Even the Corona virus can't change us. We don't want to be saved. Right?

Jesus said: "Not everyone who says to me 'Lord, Lord' shall enter the Kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven." (Matthew 7:21) That should be our key to open the room filled with lifeboats. Don't wait to pay the great cost of this world's destruction. Repent. Reconcile. Revamp. Jack is the most realistic and reasonable person on board the Titanic in the movie. He looks at life as a gift which should not be wasted. "You learn to take life as it comes to you...to make each day count."

People criticize believers nowadays more than ever, asking "Where is your God now?" They asked the same question while Noah built his ark. So it is not their fault. God is right in front of you - in the trees, the flowers, the moon, the stars, the birds, the animals and even in your own DNA. There are mysteries in the whole universe no science can explain. Only the Creator can unravel them. We might lose our family members or friends on the way. We ourselves might be afflicted with a disease. But we should "Never let go" and keep looking out for that last lifeboat to jump into, in order to steer away from the perils of this world. In the meanwhile-

Rescue the perishing, care for the dying, Snatch them in pity from sin and the grave; Weep o'er the erring one, lift up the fallen, Tell them of Jesus, the mighty to save.

- Fanny Crosby (1869)

Wait and be prepared. For THE END is nearer than it was yesterday. Find your lifeboat and believe that there's room for many.

# In Face of Suffering 

(continued)

Christ assures us that pain does not happen without God's knowledge and final control. Jesus had no perplexity in His heart, when in His pain, he thought of the love of God. In His experience of Calvary, where the fullest faith in the love of God and the deepest pain met together, there was no sense of conflict. In the end He could peacefully look up and say with His last breath, "Father, into Thy hands, I commend My Spirit." Those who have accepted this faith in the love of God and in His control, which enables them to take their cup of suffering from His very hands, have found peace and strength and even a solemn joy in the face of pain.

When suffering is accepted in this faith, we recognize its purpose; we see in it a process of dying to live. "Except a corn of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it abideth alone; but if it dies it bringeth forth much fruit." All suffering is a kind of dying; we die to self-pleasing, to comfort, to the pull and bondage of the flesh and its desires. Sorrow is also a kind of dying - to dependence on a friend who has been dear, to the touch of a hand, the sound of a voice. The pain that comes of wounded love, disappointment, shame in the failure of those we love, is the means of dying to pride, to self-satisfaction, to the false glory of life. Dying is the way of fuller
living. One of the best attested facts of history, the resurrection of Jesus, is the proof of it. It is attested by, more than anything, the new life that came into the disciples, changing them beyond belief into victorious personalities.

Suffering and pain, faced in Christ's way, can break bonds and set us free. It can detach us from the selfish outlook and open our minds to the purpose of God. It can quicken our insight into values to which comfort and ease had kept us blind. It can bring us to the brink of faith and make us alive to God. Those who have come through suffering with faith, have confessed that they found something so real that it justified their pain. They know that this pain is that of a love which through the agony reveals itself as a vital and external experience. In that love God is present, and gives Himself to us as He could in no other way.

Suffering has its power to equip us, to make us strong and tender for the help of others. Jesus said, "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me." Suffering breaks down barriers and makes us feel our kinship with those who suffer and therefore need us. It opens windows and leads us out of self-centred living. It induces a wonderful kind of charity. If we have suffered and won through, we can
speak to others and they will listen to us. Our sympathy will be real; our comfort and help will bear the hallmark of experience. We can speak with the authentic note of those who know the secret of victory. There is power to be of use to others which can be won in no other way than through suffering. The power to draw them to us can be bought at no less a cost.

These things can happen only as we meet suffering in Christ's way. His is a practical example of the way in which to meet suffering. He offers in His own faith that God has something to do for us through it, which can be done in no other way. In this faith He would have us meet suffering, not first asking, How can I escape from it? but, What can I get out of it? How can I meet it so that God can use it for His purpose? That is the way of Christ in the way of suffering. We can catch that spirit from Him only if we get His faith - the faith that shines through His own suffering and is reflected in the victory of His Spirit on the Cross. Suffering is not meaningless cruelty; it is an experience that we can take as God's appointment, and from His hands. The sense of an immediate relationship with God through all that happens to us,
makes everything sacramental. Its true meaning is only seen when we realize what God is saying to us in it and seeking to give us through it. Let us take our pain from God, thank Him, and give ourselves to bear it in Christ's way.

That spirit of dedication must find an outlet in the service of others. This is the indispensable secret of meeting suffering so that God can use it. As we think of others and how we can help them, new values come into the soul, round which our interests gather. With this new centre, powers are released at the roots of life by which the wounded spirit, like a broken tree, can blossom again.

As we learn Christ's secret of transforming His own pain into that quality of spirit that is the final answer to the problem of suffering, we find both the power to meet suffering and the light to see it through. In our self dedication to God's purpose we shall be in fellowship with Christ. Our suffering, as St. Paul said, will become part of "the dying of the Lord Jesus." It will take its place in that Divine self-sacrifice through which the world is redeemed. ©

Courtesy : "Facing Life with Christ" (1940)

> I have never thought that a Christian would be free of suffering... For our Lord suffered. And I come to believe that He sufferd, not to save us from suffering, but to teach us how to bear suffering.
> For He knew that there is no life without suffering.

From "Cry, the beloved country" by Alan Paton
However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name

- 1 Peter 4:16



## Plants in my Garden

love plants. From my childhood days, we used to have a garden if space was available on the ground; even otherwise we used to keep at least a few flower pots. In school we learn that plants absorb carbon dioxide and give us oxygen; this could be a scientific reason to love plants. Well, science aside, who is not attracted by the plants in bloom, with flowers in myriad colours?

We can have an expertly curetted garden outdoor or an impressive plant collection in our rooms.. As both of these cause a pinch in the pocket, I always prefer ordinary plants like the Rose, Bougainville and Aloe Vera. You may wonder why I choose these plants specifically, out of the hundreds of beautiful pocket friendly plants. Well, these plants have created an awe in my mind.

Let's take the Rose first; ordinary rose plants are not very fussy to grow. With sufficient sunlight and timely pruning, they bloom very fast and the flowers beckon us for a loving caress.

The Bougainville plant has nice paper-like flowers in a variety of colors ('kadalas poov' as commonly called in Malayalam). This plant also does not require much care but will remain in bloom for longer days.

Thirdly, the Aloe Vera ('kattarvazha' in Malayalam). Aloe Vera is a succulent plant species of the genus Aloe. The plant is stemless or very short-stemmed, with thick, greenish, fleshy leaves that fan out from the plant's central stem. The margin of the leaf is serrated with small teeth-like thorns. The Aloe Vera gel
is used for hair growth, skin gloss and many more.

What I found common in these three plants is that they look very beautiful from afar, and when you go near to pluck them you see thorns which can hurt you. Actually these thorns are the protection God has provided to them.

This reminds me of the dictum "Life is not a bed of Roses"; but I wish to add that "Life is not a bed of Thorns" either. We have to take care to enjoy the roses without the thorns pricking us. Aloe Vera has very small thorns all along the sides of the leaf, Roses have small thorns, and Bougainville has bigger thorns. Just as thorns are there in all these plants, there will be thorns in our life too. If we have to pluck flowers, we have to be very careful about the sharp thorns; similarly, if we imagine our life as a garden we enjoy the beauty of life, bearing with the thorn-pricks from people around us.

In the garden of our lives, God the gardener has caused beautiful flowers to bloom - like health, happiness, skills and talents. Along with these, He also provides thorns like disabilites, diseases, difficulties and disappointments.

In a broader spectrum, we can either lead a life seeing only the negatives, swallowing our dissatisfactions and sorrows, or we can lead a happy life seeing the positives in us and in others too; the choice is ours. At the end of the day all we need is happiness and this cannot be purchased. We have to generate it. Family is the fulcrum of happiness, and society is the support system for our well being. This is the garden that God has given us.


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## ...Forgiveness, Patience, Hope, Kindness, Understanding, Love...



The title given above looks like a string of virtues randomly chosen from an arbitrary list, doesn't it ? Yes, it does - when you give it a cursory look. But if you are willing to pause and give it a more purposeful look, it is likely to yield a different perspective - that it is not altogether a random choice from an arbitrary list; it would appear to you to have an underlying design. What follows is an attempt to explore this design.

In fact, in my thinking, I started with the question: Why is happiness so elusive? It led me to the concept of forgiveness. It struck me that a happy man is a man who is able to forgive and forget; an unhappy man is a man who is unable to forgive and forget; the wrong that someone has done him keeps nagging him. He is unable to hope that the wrong - doer will some day realise that he should not have done what he has done, that he will repent and mend his ways. He has no patience to wait. So we see that both patience and hope are linked to forgiveness!

If we stretch our imagination a little, we will see that it is related also to kindness; one needs to be kind in order to be able to forgive - kind, tender and
understanding. In fact, all these are not different virtues at all; they are actually different facets of the same virtue: Love. Two thousand years ago Apostle St. Paul realised this (1 Corinthians Ch. 13). If a man has love in his heart, he has everything; if a man has no love in his heart, he has nothing; he is nothing.

If you feel unhappy, dejected, pray to God to give you love in your heart. When love fills your heart, you will begin to have a different view of yourself, and also of everyone and everything around you; your life will undergo a complete transformation. It will be a wonderful experience to go through. It was love that Jesus gave everyone, and left with his disciples to be shared with everyone.

Christianity is a religion based on love, on peace, on happiness. If there is no peace in the Church today, no happiness, it is because there is no love in the Church. As the followers of Jesus, the Son of God, the Incarnation of God who is love, it is our duty to sow the seeds of love both inside and outside the Church everywhere in the world, so that peace will prevail everywhere, and happiness will not elude us any more. We need a happy world to live in - a world where love and peace reign!


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 When God created man, Adam and his wife Eve, he gave them freedom to rule over his creation, fish of the sea, birds of the air and every creature on the ground (Gen 1:28). The creation belonged to God but he gave authority to man to rule over it. God planted a garden in Eden (Gen 2:8). There were rivers to water the garden and God put Adam and Eve in charge of His garden. He put them in the garden to work there and take care of it. They were free to eat fruits from any tree except from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.One day, the serpent, more crafty than any of the other wild animals God had made, came to the garden. He urged the woman Eve to eat the forbidden fruit and she ate it. This broke the trust God had in her. Adam also ate and disobeyed God.

God gave Adam and Eve freedom with a rider. Freedom is not an unbridled privilege. One has to have one's own standard of its limits. There is a saying that one's freedom is only upto the tip of the nose of another. It means that one's freedom is to be enjoyed without hurting another person.

Nowadays parents give children the freedom to do whatever they like, wear whichever brand of clothes they choose, eat whatever food they wish, go wherever they want and be with whichever friends they have. Parents allow this out of their love for the children, but the children think it is their brith right and sometimes they misuse the freedom.

God gave freedom to Adam and Eve out of his goodness and love.

When they disobeyed Him, God was hurt. He had to banish them from the garden of Eden; they had to go out of the security and cover of the friendship and fellowship of God.

Outside the garden of Eden, they had to toil and sweat for their bread. Their disobedience had repercussions. The land was cursed; thistles and thorns grew among the crops. Animals which were tame in the beginning became wild and started to kill other animals. Chaos resulted in the animal kingdom.

Adam and Eve had two sons, Cain and Abel. Cain out of jealousy murdered Abel. Family life was disrupted - another result of disobedience to God!

The Bible teaches us what is right and what is wrong. The ten commandments given to the Israelites on Mt. Sinai are universal in nature. The 5th commandment is about honouring one's father and mother. Honouring our parents means obedience to them. According to the Mosaic Law a disobedient child deserves death by stoning.

The nation of Israel was warned many times through prophets to obey God's commandments. Because of disobedience, the Israelites were attacked by enemies and were carried away. The land became desolate. The punishment was severe. The punishment for disobedience was multiplied seven times over (Levi. 26:14-35). From A.D. 70 t0 1948 they were kept away from the Promised Land God had given them as their inheritance. The period of punishment was over by 14th May, 1948. The Israelites came back to their own land and formed the state of Israel. This was the fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah (66:8) some 2800 years ago.

The same God reigns over us and by His grace we are not consumed. His laws are perfect. Freedom has its limits. Disobedience will result in punishment. Live by God's standards.
"Trust the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him and he will make your path straight" (Prov. 3:5).

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One evening, I was ruminating over the evils and perils of Covid, and my thoughts drifted to the narrations in the Old Testament about the construction and destruction of the Jerusalem Temple. King Solomon constructed the first Temple, and Emperor Nebuchadnezzar destroyed it. But the story does not end there. Years later, the Temple was rebuilt and worship restarted. This helped in rebuilding the City as well. The Temple symbolizes the rise and fall of a nation - Israel.

The Jews believed that they were the chosen people of God. But that belief did not help them to maintain their faith and loyalty to God. As history reveals, there were many wars and invasions. In B.C. 587, the Temple was destroyed and people were taken captive. Then they would lament that it was God's punishment; sufferings and repentance would follow. This used to happen in a cycle. Once they returned, they would reconstruct the Temple... and the City.

With the invasion of Corona, we are also in a state of exile. We lost many things that we thought were ours - jobs, businesses, wealth and even life! People find it hard to live, and the reality is even worse. Every suicide is a stark reminder that someone finds life unsustainable. Now we are witnessing the "destruction of the Temple" and experiencing "captivity". In plain words, we find ourselves in a helpless situation. We are kept away from the "Temple", literally.

We know or rather should know that this destruction demands a rebuilding. Hence the title, "REBUILD THE TEMPLE". Frankly, with due respect to all my knowledgeable friends and in all humility to our theologians, I do not subscribe to the view that Corona is God's punishment... punishment to whom? It is a man-made misery. It has destroyed people all over the world... and not just sinners only! But I have no objection if someone uses this to refine and reform spiritually. Whether it is God's punishment or man-made misery, the damages caused by the pandemic remain a reality. It is more than 18 months that we have suffered. So we have to "rebuild the Temple... and the City". We have to resume our spiritual life and come back to normalcy in our social life as well. For this we want God's blessings and guidance.

In Jewish history, Nebuchadnezzar plundered everything in Israel, but his successors Cyrus and then Darius ordered and helped the reconstruction. (Ref: Book of Ezra in the Old Testament) Unfortunately we are being plundered by those who have to help us in rebuilding. Our religious, social and political leaders have to come forward like Ezra and Zerubbabel. Our businessmen and bankers have to chip in... Our doctors and scientists have to join in... Our rulers have to lead us to the "holy land". So let us "Rebuild the Temple... and the City", before total destruction befalls us.


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